

**Abstract 351**

**TITLE:** HIV Prevention Programs Target Women Over Ages Fifty

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**ISSUE:** With the number of heterosexually-transmitted HIV infections increasing in older American women, and their diagnosed AIDS cases having nearly tripled between 1993 and 1997, females in the over 50 population must be made aware that HIV is not just a disease of the young. They, and those who serve them, must be taught that they, too, can be at risk; that they may be seen more vulnerable due to lack knowledge and advancing age.

**SETTING:** Interventions discussed in this presentation can be replicated in any formal social service or informal, peer-driven HIV prevention program. Therefore, this presentation is appropriate for policy makers, health care and social service providers, educators, caregivers and volunteers; it also will include an older woman's personal perspective on living with HIV infection.

**PROJECT:** Leaders of the National Association on HIV Over Fifty (NAHOF), with assistance from Good Samaritan Project, an AIDS service organization in Kansas City, M O., began a campaign three years ago to offer transmission/prevention trainings for mid-life and older women and their providers. Calling attention to the fact that a combination of ageism and sexism has resulted in older women being invisible in the HIV/AIDS community, volunteers have traveled from coast to coast, alerting audiences to the risks of HIV infection and teaching negotiation and empowerment skills.

**RESULTS:** By addressing conferences, meetings and small gatherings in about 20 states, and Washington, D.C., NAHOF representatives have educated hundreds of women, their service providers and caregivers, on HIV infection in older females. Also, this previously neglected and ignored issue has attracted the American media, which has brought HIV/AIDS in the elderly to public notice through printed and televised reports.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Grass-roots work by individuals can set in motion efforts to educate women over age 50 to the reality that they are as at-risk as their younger counterparts for HIV infection, depending on their behaviors. Transmission/prevention programs directed at older females, including the sharing of personal stories which can generate publicity in the media, will ultimately result in a more informed population, one that then can better protect itself from disease.

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